

"Thank you Chairman Lantos for bringing such an important resolution before the Foreign Affairs Committee for mark-up, and for the profiles in courage that you, as our Chairman, and our Speaker are demonstrating today that this measure should be heard in the House of Representatives. "The importance of Turkey as an ally to the United States, both as a supporter of the War on Terrorism and our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq obviously have been well stated and should not be taken for granted and I certainly don't, but I do support this resolution. Much has been said about the potential impact on our national security in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. But I would ask my colleagues who have this concern to note that in fact when Russia recognized the Armenian genocide in 1995 their trade with Turkey has since increased by 351 percent. When Greece recognized the genocide - who have had tensions over centuries with Turkey - in 1997, their trade has since increased by 266 percent. And yes, the European Parliament passed last year a set of economic conditions and social conditions prior to the entry of Turkey into the European Union; one of those conditions was the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and Turkey still, to this day, seeks entry into the European Union. Nation-states at the end of the day, ultimately, notwithstanding their own internal politics, do what is in their best interest. Because of the assistance we provide in foreign aid and the important relationship that we have with Turkey, I believe that in fact if we pass this resolution, Turkey will not like it, but they certainly will do what is in their best interest and that will be to continue to have a relationship between our great nations.

"But for me, as I suspect as it is for others on the Committee, this resolution involves one issue - the simple matter of man's injustice to mankind... as it has occurred in Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, the Holocaust, and in this instance, this resolution is about the Armenian Genocide.

"In May 2006, I went on a Codel to Iraq, Turkey and Greece with my colleague Mr. Pence. As we traveled through Turkey, we had a meeting with Abdulla Gül, at that time he was the Foreign Minister and today he is the President of Turkey. I'd like to relay a part of our conversation to the members of this Committee. I talked about the positive relationship with Turkey and America and our long standing friendship. That modern day Turkey stands for a successful, secular democracy, a responsible nation-state on the world stage.

"But I also told him that all nations in the world have periods of their history that they'd soon forget. I explained that slavery in early America is one of our chapters that many would overlook... And even some of our beloved Founding Fathers held slaves. Slavery created turmoil in our nation for decades, and was one of the causes the Civil War. The issues of civil rights in America continued for 100 years following the Civil War, resulting in the Civil Rights Act passed by Congress in 1964. And despite this monumental legislation, we still have problems today in our country, but we acknowledge and we confront them just as modern day Turkey should.

"The purpose of the resolution today is not to belittle the accomplishments of Turkey; but rather to acknowledge an event that occurred in the early 20th century... involving a plan to remove people from their homes and lands, and sadly, evolved into one of the first genocides in the modern world. Modern day Turkey was not responsible for that genocide but they should acknowledge it and they should move on. It is important we acknowledge this fact, in an effort to heal the wounds and build new relations among Turkey, Armenia, and the world communities.

"One can debate specific incidents, but growing up in Fresno, California, the land of William Saroyan, I can tell you I heard stories as a boy from grandparents of my friends -- the Kezerian, Koligian and Abramhian families about being forced to leave their homes, the stories of the long marches that evolved into the massacres and murders of women and children. Clearly, they believed there was a systematic approach to eliminate the Armenian communities in places that had been their homes and farms for centuries. My Armenian friends believe that what happened between 1915-1923 was a systematic approach, and was among the first genocides of the 20th century, and so do I.

"This resolution is not meant to reopen the wounds or degenerate the importance of our relationship with the Turkish people or their government... and an important ally. But my vote in favor of this resolution is to accurately reflect history. It is important that we support this measure, and move on. I urge an 'Aye' vote."

--Given in the House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs, 10/10/07.